

# The Fountain of Life

Elder Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles  
BYU Devotional given March 29, 1992

We shall start at the very beginning. “The Gods went down to organize man in their own image, in the image of the Gods to form they him, male and female to form they them. And the Gods said: We will bless them. And the Gods said: We will cause them to be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it.” (Abraham 4:27-28.)

And so the cycle of human life began on this earth as “Adam knew his wife, and she bare unto him sons and daughters, and they began to multiply and to replenish the earth. And ... the sons and daughters of Adam began to divide two and two in the land, and to till the land, and to tend flocks, and they also begat sons and daughters.” (Moses 5:2-3.)

## **Commandment Never Rescinded**

The commandment to multiply and replenish the earth has never been rescinded. It is essential to the plan of redemption and is the source of human happiness. Through the righteous exercise of this power, as through nothing else, we may come close to our Father in Heaven and experience a fulness of joy, even godhood! The power of procreation is not an incidental part of the plan of happiness; it is the key—the very key.

The power to generate life emerges in the body of the male and the female as each grows to maturity, empowering a man to become a father and a woman to become a mother.

## **Constant in Mankind**

The desire to mate in humankind is constant and very strong. Our happiness in mortal life, our joy and exaltation, are dependent upon how we respond to these persistent, compelling physical desires.

As the procreative power matures in early manhood and womanhood there occurs, in a natural way, very personal feelings unlike any other physical experience. It is not without meaning that the process through which life is conceived should be accompanied by feelings of such depth and attraction that they draw the individual to seek a repetition of them.

Ideally, mating begins with romance. Though customs may vary, romance flourishes with all the storybook feelings of excitement and anticipation,

and sometimes rejection. There are moonlight and roses, love letters, love songs, poetry, the holding of hands, and other worthy expressions of affection between a young man and a young woman. The world disappears around a couple, and they experience feelings of joy. Every couple in love is positive that no couple since Adam and Eve has felt quite the same as they do.

There are other patterns of romance which appear to be too sensible, too quiet, even dull. Nevertheless, they embody a depth of affection and romantic love that the deadly serious, silly senseless, or head-in-the-clouds ones will experience only as they mature.

### **Mature Love**

And if you suppose that the full-blown rapture of young romantic love is the sum of the possibilities which spring from the fountains of life, you have not yet lived to see the devotion and the comfort of longtime married love. Married couples are tried by temptation, misunderstandings, separation, financial problems, family crises, illness; and all the while love grows stronger, the mature love enjoys a bliss not even imagined by newlyweds.

True love requires a mutual respect and that the couple reserve until after the marriage the sharing of that affection which unlocks those sacred powers in that fountain of life. It means avoiding pre-marriage situations in which physical desire might take control. Courtship is a time to measure integrity, moral strength, and worthiness. The invitation, "If you love me, you will let me," exposes a major flaw in character. It deserves the reply: "If you really loved me, you would never ask me to transgress. If you understood the gospel, you couldn't!"

Pure love presupposes that only after a pledge of eternal fidelity, a legal and a lawful ceremony, and ideally after the sealing ordinance in the temple are those procreative powers released for the full expression of love. They are to be shared only and solely with that one who is our companion in marriage.

Participation in the mating process offers an experience like nothing else in life. When entered into worthily, it combines the most exquisite and exalted physical, emotional, and spiritual feelings associated with the word *love*. Those feelings and the lifelong need for one another bind a husband and wife together in a marriage wherein all of the attributes of adult masculinity are complemented by the priceless feminine virtues of womanhood.

That part of life has no equal, no counterpart, in all human experience. It will, when covenants are made and kept, last eternally, “For therein are the keys of the holy priesthood ordained, that you may receive honor and glory” (D&C 124:34), “which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever” (D&C 132:19).

But romantic love is incomplete; it is a prelude. Love is nourished by the coming of children, who spring from that fountain of life entrusted to couples in marriage. Conception takes place in a wedded embrace between husband and wife. A tiny body begins to form after a pattern of magnificent complexity. A child emerges in the miracle of birth, created in the image of its earthly father and mother, able to see and hear and feel and to perceive through physical senses. Within its mortal body is a spirit, able to feel and perceive spiritual things. Dormant in the mortal body of the child is the power to beget offspring in its own image.

“The spirit and the body are the soul of man” (D&C 88:15); hence there are spiritual and physical laws to obey if we are to be happy.

### **Moral and Natural Laws**

There are eternal laws, including laws relating to this power to give life, “irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated” (D&C 130:20). There are spiritual laws which define the moral standard for mankind (see JST, Romans 7:14–15; 2 Nephi 2:5; D&C 29:34; D&C 134:6). There are covenants that bind, seal, safeguard, and give promise of eternal blessings. There are physical or natural laws which govern attraction to a mate, love of offspring, and the instinct to protect them.

### **Thou Shalt Not Kill**

Every time physical conditions are met, conception will take place, whether in wedlock or out. Once a life is conceived, to destroy that life, even before birth, is a major transgression, save conception results from rape, the mother’s life hangs in the balance, or the life of the unborn is certified to be hopeless. We do not know all about when a spirit enters the body, but we do know that life, in any form, is very precious. While we are given the power to generate life and commanded to do so, we have no license to destroy it. “For the Lord … in all things hath forbidden it, from the beginning of man” (Ether 8:19). And the commandment given at Sinai was renewed in this dispensation: “Thou shalt not kill” (Exodus 20:13; see also 2 Nephi 9:35) “nor do anything like unto it” (D&C 59:6).

### **To Be Controlled**

The eternal laws of the gospel of Jesus Christ do not prohibit our responding to inborn, God-given mating instincts. Alma admonished his son Shiblon, “See that ye bridle all your passions, that ye may be filled with love” ([Alma 38:12](#)). A bridle is used to guide, to direct. Our passion is to be controlled—but not controlled by extermination, as with a plague of insects; not controlled by eradication, as with a disease. It is to be controlled as electricity is controlled, to generate power and life. When lawfully used, the power of procreation will bless and it will sanctify (see Joseph F.

Smith, *Gospel Doctrine* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1977], p. 309).

The gospel tells us when and with whom these sacred powers may be safely experienced. As with all things, the scriptures do not contain page after page of detailed commandments covering every possible application of the law of life. Rather they speak in general terms, leaving us free to apply the principles of the gospel to meet the infinite variety of life.

We are free to ignore the counsels and commandments of the scriptures, but when the revelations speak in such blunt terms, such as “thou shalt not,” we had better pay attention. When we obey, we can enjoy these life-giving powers in the covenant of marriage, and from our fountains of life will spring our children, our family! Love between husband and wife can be constant and bring fulfillment and contentment all the days of their lives.

### **Children of God**

No greater ideal has been revealed than the supernal truth that we are the children of God, and that by virtue of our creation we differ from all other living things (see [Moses 6:8-10, 22, 59](#)). “All flesh,” the scriptures teach, “is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts” ([1 Corinthians 15:39](#)).

Men and women have unique responsibility in begetting life. The scriptures tell us that “men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil. And the law is given unto men.” ([2 Nephi 2:5](#).) We are intelligent beings and we are accountable for our actions, even for our thoughts (see [Alma 12:14](#)). Creatures in the animal kingdom are drawn together in season by the compelling instinct to mate. Once impregnation takes place, they separate, ordinarily leaving the mother alone to protect and provide for her offspring, for that is the way of the animal. But it is not the way of mankind. Family life among animals is a rarity and even then is generally temporary. Except for rare examples, for instance among birds, the bond between animal parents is transitory; between sire and offspring, almost nonexistent.

Animals cannot be accountable for the standards of morality by which mankind is judged. They are ruled by the physical laws of nature. Animals by and large are promiscuous in responding to their mating instincts.

Nevertheless, their mating rituals follow set patterns and have rigid limitations. For instance, animals do not pair up with their own gender to satisfy their mating instincts. Nor are these mating instincts expressed in the molestation of their own offspring.

Children of God can willfully surrender to their carnal nature and, seemingly without remorse, defy the laws of morality and degrade themselves even below the beasts.

### **The Tempter**

Temptations are ever present in mortal life. The adversary is jealous toward all who have power to beget life. He cannot beget life; he is impotent. He and those who followed him were cast out of heaven and forfeited the right to a mortal body. He will, if he can, take possession of *your* body, direct how you use it. His angels even begged to inhabit the bodies of swine (see Matthew 8:31). He knows the supernal value of our power of procreation and jealously desires to rule those who have it. And, the revelations tell us, “he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself” (2 Nephi 2:27). He will tempt you, if he can, to degrade, to corrupt, if possible to destroy this gift by which we may, if we are worthy, have eternal increase (see D&C 132:28–31).

### **The Obsession**

The rapid and sweeping deterioration of values in society is characterized now by a preoccupation—even an obsession—with the procreative act. Abstinence before marriage and fidelity within it are openly scoffed at as being out of date; marriage and parenthood are ridiculed as burdensome and unnecessary. Modesty, a virtue present in a refined individual or society, is all but gone.

Morality is no longer a measure of character for prominent role models for our youth—the politicians, the athletes, the entertainers. With ever fewer exceptions, what we see and read and hear has the mating act as the central theme. Censorship of any kind is forced offstage as a violation of individual freedom. That which should be absolutely private is disrobed and acted out center stage. In the shadows backstage wait addiction, pornography, perversion, infidelity, abortion, and—the ugliest of them all—incest and molestation. And all of them are on the increase. In company with them now is the pestilent disease, which, like a biblical plague, threatens races of mankind. In fact, all of mankind.

The philosophies which now converge all have one thing in common: either by insinuation or by declaration they reject God as our creator, as our Father, as our lawgiver.

### **The Evil Idea**

The knowledge that we are the children of God is a refining, even an exalting truth. On the other hand, no idea has been more destructive of happiness, no philosophy has produced more sorrow, more heartbreak, more suffering and mischief, no idea has contributed more to the erosion of the family than the idea that we are not the offspring of God, but only advanced animals. There flows from that idea the not too subtle perception that we are compelled to yield to every carnal urge, are subject to physical but not to moral law.

The man-from-animal theory has been passed about enough to be pronounced true on the basis of general acceptance. Because it seems to offer logical explanations for *some* things, it is widely taught and generally accepted as the solution to the mystery of life.

I know there are two views on the subject. But it is one thing to measure this theory solely against intellectual or academic standards, quite another to measure it against moral or spiritual or doctrinal standards.

When the theory that man is the offspring of animals is planted in young minds, it should be accompanied by careful instruction to set it in isolation in the garden of the mind until faith is well rooted. Otherwise, seeds of doubt may spring up and choke out the seedling of faith, and the harvest will be bitter fruit and the giver will have served the wrong master.

***The knowledge that we are the children of God is a refining, even an exalting truth.***

### **Freedom to Choose**

Lehi taught that men are free and must be free, free “to act for themselves and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the law at the great and last day” (2 Nephi 2:26).

Society now excuses itself from any responsibility for the high incidence of sexual immorality in young people except for teaching children in school the physical process of human reproduction in order to prevent pregnancy or disease, and providing teenagers with devices which are supposed to protect them against both. When any effort is made to include in these courses basic universal values—not just values of the Church but those of civilization, of society itself—the protest arises, “You are imposing religion upon us, infringing upon our freedom.”

It is interesting how one virtue, when given exaggerated or fanatical emphasis, can be used to batter down another. How clever the deception when freedom—the virtue—is invoked to justify vice!

The advocates for lifting all restraints excuse themselves from responsibility by saying, “I do not intend to do any of these things myself, but I think everyone should be free to choose what they want to do without any moral or legal interference.” With that same logic, one could argue that all traffic signs and barriers set to keep the careless from falling to their death should be pulled down on the theory that each individual has the moral right to choose how close to the edge he will go.

### **There Are Higher Laws**

Anyone who has been taught the plan of salvation understands that to advocate freedom from all moral restraints is to preach what is contrary to God’s will. The phrase “free agency” does not appear in the scriptures. The only agency spoken of there is *moral* agency—“which,” the Lord said, “I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment” (D&C 101:78).

Civilizations of the past—Sodom and Gomorrah, for example—have destroyed themselves by disobedience to the laws of morality. “For the Spirit of the Lord will not always strive with man. And when the Spirit ceaseth to strive with man then cometh speedy destruction.” (2 Nephi 26:11; see also Genesis 6:3; Ether 2:15; D&C 1:33; Moses 8:17.)

If we pollute our fountains of life or lead others to transgress in that way, there will be penalties more “exquisite” and “hard to bear” (see D&C 19:15) than all the physical pleasure could ever be worth. Alma told his son Corianton, “Know ye not, my son, that these things are an abomination in the sight of the Lord; yea, most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost?” (Alma 39:5). We do not escape the consequences when we transgress.

The only legitimate employment of the powers of procreation is between husband and wife who have been legally and lawfully married. Anything other than this violates the commandments of God himself. And as Alma said, “I say unto you, if ye speak against it, it matters not, for the word of God must be fulfilled” (Alma 5:58).

You who are married will know the joy of parenthood and feel the responsibility which comes with family life. Always keep in mind and make a central part of your lives the rearing of your children in light and truth.

Give to these precious souls the best that you are learning from life. And accept this caution. A married couple may be tempted to introduce things into their relationship that are unworthy. Do not, as the scriptures warn, “change the natural use into that which is against nature” ([Romans 1:26](#)). If you do, the tempter will drive a wedge between you. If something unworthy has become part of your relationship, don’t ever do it again! Now, what exactly do I mean by that? You know what I mean by that, and I will not respond to any questions about it.

### **Exceptions**

When we speak of marriage, family life, there inevitably comes to mind, “What about the exceptions? There are always exceptions!” Some are born with limitations and cannot beget children. Some innocent ones have their marriage wrecked because of the infidelity of their spouses. Others do not marry and live lives of single worthiness, while at once the wayward and the wicked seem to enjoy it all.

For now, I offer this comfort: God is our Father! All the love and generosity manifest in the ideal earthly father is magnified, beyond the capacity of mortal mind to comprehend, in Him who is our Father and our God. His judgments are just, His mercy without limit, His power to compensate beyond any earthly comparison.

Remember that mortal life is a brief moment, for we will live eternally. There will be ample—I almost used the word *time*, but time does not apply here—there will be ample opportunity for all injustices, all inequities to be made right, all loneliness and deprivation compensated, and all worthiness rewarded when we keep the faith. “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” ([1 Corinthians 15:19](#)). It does not all end with mortal death; it just begins.

### **Repentance**

Already I have warned that the awesome powers of the adversary will be employed to entice all mankind to sinfully use the sacred power of procreation. Do not yield, for every debt of transgression must be paid “till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing” ([Matthew 5:26](#)). The law of justice demands it, and “... your sufferings [will] be sore—how sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not” ([D&C 19:15](#)).

In the universal battle for human souls, the adversary takes enormous numbers of prisoners. Many, knowing of no way to escape, are pressed into his service. Every soul confined in a concentration camp of sin and guilt has

a key to the gate. The key is labeled Repentance. The adversary cannot hold them, if they know how to use it. The twin principles of repentance and forgiveness exceed in strength the awesome power of the tempter.

The world being what it is, if you have already made a mistake it can certainly be understood. It cannot, under the law, be condoned, but it can be understood. You must stop conduct that is immoral. You must stop it now!

Nowhere is the generosity and kindness and mercy of God more manifest than in repentance. Do you understand the consummate cleansing power of the atonement made by the Son of God, our Savior, our Redeemer, who said, "I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent"? (D&C 19:16.) I know of no sin connected with transgression of the moral law which cannot be forgiven, assuming, of course, full and complete repentance. I do not exempt abortion.

The formula is stated in forty words: "Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more. By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them." (D&C 58:42-43.) I know of no more beautiful words in all of revelation than these. "The same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more."

### **Confession—The Bishop**

The formula for repentance requires that we confess. Our first confession is to the Lord in prayer. When our mistakes are not grievous ones, and if they are personal, that may be all that is required by way of confession.

If our transgression includes tampering with the procreative capacities of another of either gender, then there is a necessary confession beyond prayer. From His priesthood the Lord has designated the bishop to be the common judge. If your transgression is serious, and your conscience will tell you whether it is or not, seek out the bishop.

The bishop represents the Lord in extending forgiveness for the Church. At times he must administer bitter medicine. Alma told Corianton, "Now, repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment" (Alma 42:16). I would not want to live in a world where there was no repentance, and if punishment is a condition of that, I will willingly accept that. There is the idea abroad that one can send a postcard of prayer and receive in return full forgiveness and be ready at once for a mission or for marriage in the temple. Not so. There are payments to be made. If a bishop offers comfort only and, in misguided kindness, seeks to relieve you of the

painful but healing process in connection with repentance, he will not serve you well.

Forgiveness from the Lord is earned through great personal effort. It takes courage to face the reality of your transgression, accept whatever penalty is required, and allow sufficient time for the process to work. When that is done, you will be *innocent* again. The Lord said: “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins” (Isaiah 43:25).

### **He Will Remember Our Sins No More**

“This is the covenant that I will make with them … , I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more” (Hebrews 10:16-17).

Alma, who in his youth had a rebellious spirit, spoke from his own experience about the great relief repentance brings: “Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death. And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more. And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!” (Alma 36:18-20.)

Sometimes, even after confession and penalties, the most difficult part of repentance is to forgive oneself. President Joseph Fielding Smith told of a woman who had repented of immoral conduct and was struggling to find her way. She asked him what she should do now. In turn, he asked her to read to him from the Old Testament the account of Sodom and Gomorrah, of Lot, and of Lot’s wife, who was turned to a pillar of salt (see Genesis 19:26). Then he asked her what lesson those verses held for her. She answered, “The Lord will destroy those who are wicked.”

“Not so,” President Smith told this repentant woman. “The lesson for *you* is ‘*Don’t look back!*’”

### **The Temple**

Reverently now I use the word *temple*. As I do, there comes to mind the words: “Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground” (Exodus 3:5). I envision a sealing room and an altar, with a young couple kneeling there, or perhaps a more mature couple who joined the Church a year ago. This sacred temple ordinance is more,

much more, than a wedding, for this marriage is sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise, and the scriptures promise that the participants, if they remain worthy, “shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions” (D&C 132:19).

I think of the words of the sealing ordinance, which cannot be written here. I understand, in a small measure at least, the sacred nature of the fountain of life which is in us. And I see the joy that awaits those who accept this supernal gift and use it worthily.